A Page of Short Stories

"MR. PETAW PAWKINS"

AT the dinner table at one of the hotels in the Berkshires, a widow, and her daughter, Ethel, had been staying for a week and where the the plain Mr. P. Perkins had arrived an hour previously, the widow put up her lorgnette, gave him a comprehensive glance and announced that he was passable. What the daughter thought will probably appear later on. What the plain Mr. P. Perkins thought can be told without injury to the story.

"Mother and daughter," he said to himself. "Mother may be a widow. She is a snob, anyway. Daughter isn't affected that way. Good face, good figure, golden hair and blue eyes. Aged about 20. Sweet disposition and critcical. I shall hope for an introduction to her."

Mrs. Lazelle would have been a snob years ago if her husband John had been allowed to control the fortune he had made. He was a plain man, being a contractor. He smoked a clay pipe. He permitted himself to be called Jack.

His wife's name was Madaline, and he insisted on calling her "Maddy." He wouldn't even agree with her that the name Lazelle should be pronounced Law-zelle.

The wife had to hang on and wait until he had been gathered to his fathers and she had possession of the estate. Then she persisted to carry out her long cherished ideas. If those ideas had not infested the daughter it was not the mother's fault.

Three hours after dinner a stroke of good fortune came to the plain Mr. P. Perkins. He was strolling the highway, a mile or more from the hotel, when the horses attached to a carriage in which Mrs. Lazelle and her daughter were riding ran away.

Mr. Perkins saw them coming and made ready. His actions were more athletic than heroic. As the horses came tearing up he sprang forward and seized one by the bits and hung on and after being dragged for a hundred feet he checked both.

He lost is hat and his clothing was torn and rumpled but things were not as bad as when he had a row with a New York cabby who took him for a stranger from Oshkosh and tried to work him for double fare.

The daughter expressed her thanks in appropriate words but the mother gushed. She insisted that the lives of all had been miraculously saved and she hunted the directory for bigwords to fling at Mr. Perkins' head.

The driver had been thrown out at the finish and had had enough of it. Mr. Perkins got into the carriage and drove the ladies back to the hotel.

Mrs. Lazelle was overcome. It was the proper thing to do—to be overcome and be taken to her room and send for the hotel doctor. After five minutes of questioning he found that her neck had not been broken and that her heart had not ceased to beat, and it so happened that he could give her information about her rescuer.

"You don't know him?" he queried. "Why his father is the president of the Gold Leaf Trust Company, owns three or four mines out west, and is sure to leave him a million or two. That young man is certainly a catch for some one."

Mrs. Lazelle sent for the hero that she might thank him. She did thank him. It was the 76th time she had thanked him since he brought the horses to a standstill.

When she had got through thanking him introductions followed. Introductions should have preceded the thanks, but she was in a hurry to let the hero know how grateful she was that 56 of the bones in her body had not been broken and splintered. Mrs. Jawn Lawzelle and Miss Ethlal Lawzelle," was the way it was put on the one side, and on the other:

"Pleased to meet you. I am Mr. Perkins."

What—Perkins!" gasped the mother.

"Plain Mr. Perkins, madam."

Mrs. Law-zelle froze up. Mr. Perkins might have a rich father and be the catch of the season, but think of the name! It was not blue-blooded. It had no twang to it. Such a name as that called for a cheap room on the third floor.

In other days when her husband was holding her back, she had bought the family meat of a butcher named Perkins and had had more than one quarrel with him about the amount of bone he had sent with the steak.

When the plain Mr. P. Perkins had made his bow and left the room she expressed her disgust and disappointment and cautioned Ethel to be chary about accepting his advances.

"I think he is already interested in you," she said, "but it must not go too far. Society must not mix the name of Law-zelle with a Perkins."

"But you snubbed him, mother, and he will probably avoid us in future," protested the daughter.

"MR. PETAW PAWKINS."

"Then it will be as well. People must be taught their place, you know, even if they do stop runaway horses and put you under temporary obligations."

The plain Mr. Perkins saw the situation as it existed and did not take the snub. He treated the mother with all due deference and he became better acquainted with the daughter because he admired her and was interested.

The mother was Argus-eyed, but during the next three weeks the couple had many opportunities for a few words together. Just what the state of affairs existed between them when he returned to New York, and the Lazelles to Philadelphia, must be judged by the fact that when winter came and mother and daughter set out for Palm Beach he was posted on their going.

He didn't hie away at once. He had certain things to see to first. One of those things was a quiet talk with a book canvasser who became interested at once.

The Lazelles had been settled at the beach for a fortnight when Clarence Fitzroy arrived. He was English. He had on English clothes. He talked English. He didn't say that he was the second son of Lord Fitzroy, but left that for the hotel people to infer and for Mrs. Lazelle to find out.

Inside of three days he was a discovered man and the mother was saying to the daughter:

"Think of the difference, Ethel! Think of the difference between the name of Perkins and Fitzroy! There you have the difference between a plebeian and an aristocrat. I am charmed with the gentleman. I want you to be charmed. My dear, I haven't said much to you on the subject of marriage, but it is time now that I told you that it would break my heart to have you fall in love with a plebian. If Fitzroy should become interested in you, and I believe he will, I hope you will encourage him. Think what an honor it would be to link the names of Fitzroy and Lawzelle together!"

Miss Ethel did not argue the matter. Having been a girl once herself, the mother ought to have known that when a girl won't argue she has already made up her mind, but no hobby had blinded her to all else.

Lord Fitzroy, as Mrs. Lazelle insisted on calling him, was soon devoted to mother and daughter and at least one of them was very proud of the fact. The other bore with his attentions and received his compliments as a matter of course.

At the hotel office there was consultations as to how long Fitzroy could pay his board and it was finally decided that three weeks was the limit. After that he would have to be quietly told to find a boarding house where the landlady had confidence in human nature. Hotel men generally hit those things off pretty closely.

The three weeks were about up when the plain Mr. P. Perkins arrived. He found Miss Ethel on the veranda and her mother and Lord Fitzroy strolling on the sand by moonlight. Arm and arm Ethel and he went down upon the sands to meet the mother and he to be introduced to the stranger.

They had not reached them yet when the mother came flying to call out:

"Oh, Ethel; oh, Mr. Perkins!"

"But what is the matter?" was asked.

"He—called me 'old gal' and said he would marry either me or Ethel for half a million dollars! He—he said he was dead broke and wanted to borrow a hundred of me! He—he—!"

With the daughter on one side and Mr. Perkins on the other the hysterical Mrs. Lazelle was lead to a seat, and then Mr. Perkins stood before her and said:

"Mrs. Lazelle, I have the honor of asking you if I may pay my attentions to your daughter with a view of matrimony in the near future?"

"But your name is Perkins!" wailed the upset mother.

"Yes."

"It's P. Perkins!"

"Yes? The P. stands for Peter."

'Peter Perkins! O, it is too much—too much!"

"But there is a way out. You can pronounce Peter as 'Petaw,' and Perkins as 'Paw-kins,' and there you have it."

"It will be Law-zelle and Paw-kins," added Miss Ethel.

"Why, so it will," said the mother as she brightened up. "Law-zelle and Paw-kins and I am to call you Pe-taw instead of Peter. Mr. Paw-kins, we will talk of this at onther time, but I think you can count on my consent—I think you can. Ethel, my dear, why didn't we ever come to see that Perkins could be made Paw-kins and that Peter as Pe-taw has the real twang of the aristocracy?"

"MRS. PHILLIPS"

LITTLE MRS. PHILLIPS never fully explained just where or who Mr. Phillips was. She let it be inferred that he was in the Philippines and that her health did not permit her to follow him.

With that explantion Somersville was forced to be content, for little Mrs. Phillips was not communicative and she had a quiet way of parrying investigative questions, while not seeming to do so, that the most expert gossip found baffling indeed.

Gradually the rumors were dropped until there remained only the report that Donald Phillips was an army officer, who had taken to drink, and whose brutality had caused a permanent separation in spite of the fact that the pleasant faced little woman still loved him very dearly.

Then came the railroad accident, the first unusual happening in Somersville in years. Just outside of the town two passenger trains disputed the right of way.

Almost the first body to be released was clad in army blue and from the papers in the pocket it was learned that here was all that remained of Capt. Donald Phillips. The letter bore a Manilla postmark and the first question that flashed about the little group of workers was, "Who will tell the widow?"

"I'll get Mandy," offered Ted Prowse. "She's used to it."

The others nodded, glad of so easy a solution of the problem, but Hank Carey alone made a dissenting gesture.

Mandy had come to tell him that his mother had passed away and he still vividly remembered the grim horror of the commonplace announcement. Somehow he felt that the little widow should be shielded from the platitudes of Ted Prowse's sister, so he started across the fields to ask his own sister to break the news before Mandy could be summoned.

He was well on his way toward the road when in the next field he was startled to see the familiar little figure of Mrs. Phillips hurrying across the snow.

"I heard that there had been an accident and I came to help," she explained nervously. "I can nurse and I have helped to dress wounds. I'm not afraid of the sight of blood. I'm brave—that way."

Hank shivered as he thought of the test to which he should have to put her bravery. It never would do to let her go on, only to find the body of her husband lying there, nor would it be right to induce her to return to town as she would only want to come back again. No matter how bad a man may be in life, death heals old wounds quickly, and she would feel the old love and wish to go to his side.

"I wish you'd wait just a moment," he pleaded, feeling both glad and sorry that he had met her.

"Wait now," she cried in surprise, "with men and women in need of assistance?"

"You see," he began lamely enough, "there may be reasons why you should not go. Were you expecting any one on that train?"

She shook her head wonderingly.

"Because there might be some one on the train you knew," he reminded. "Perhaps some one was coming to see you."

"But no one ever comes to see me," she cried. "I have no kith or kin."

"You've forgotten your husband," he reminded, and as an uncertain look crossed her face he added: "You know he might be coming home from the Philippines."

The color flooded her face, then receded, leaving it white and drawn.

"I had forgotten—my husband," she said slowly.

"He's over there," Hank said gently. "There are papers in his pocket that says he's Donald Phillips, and he must have been in the Philippines because there's a lot of letters in his pockets with the stamps on."

With a little quavering cry she tottered unsteadily toward him and he caught her in his arms to prevent her falling.

"Don't take it too hard," he said gently. "You've got lots of good friends left that'll look after you."

"It isn't that,' she explained with an hysterical laugh. "He's not my husband. I never had a husband."

"Yes you did," he reminded. It was evident that she had lost her memory through grief. "He was a soldier in the Philippines and he was coming to see you, I guess."

"There may have been a Major Phillips," she admitted, "but he was not my husband. I never was married. Back east in Millhampton they used to call me an old maid and all that sort of thing. I had three sisters and they all were married, but somehow no one ever courted me. I was the youngest girl and mother was sick for years. When she died I was too old to get married and they all poked fun at me. Father left a lot of money when he died and meantime all the "girls died, so it all come to me.

"I moved away, and I was bound to be a widow even if I hadn't had a husband.

"I wasn't hurting any one and I didn't suppose it ever would be found out. Now I suppose every one will despise me, and I'll have to move again. I was so happy here."

"I guess maybe you'll move again," assented Hank, "but it'll be to move to my house if you will. I wouldn't let any one see that I loved a married woman, but now that I have the right to love you—have I, dear?"

"I guess you have," she assented shyly.

"We'll explain that your husband died years ago, for some one will claim this poor chap over there. I guess you don't want to go there now," and with his arm about her waist he led her from the direction of death to the new life that was opening up to them.

A decree of fate

JULIAN GROVE, burdened with a heavy suitcase and an humbled pride, descended the steps of the yellow day coach that formed half of the train on the Linden Valley road. He sat himself on an unused baggage truck to wait until the southbound train should come along.

The Junction train had run down to meet the northbound, and when that heavy express had gone tearing into the distance, and the Junction train had scuttled back up to the valley toward Lindon, Julian had the station platform very much to himself.

The few waiting passengers were huddled about the stove in the tiny shed that served at the Junction station. Julian preferred the winter sunlight and the crisp air to the lifeless heat of the big stove and the reek of so many bodies. He was going humbly to confess his faults, and he wanted to keep clearheaded that they might remain fresh in his mind.

He felt that he needed to be watchful, for in his heart he believed the faults to be few. There was grave danger that he might forget again that he was the offender, and take the same attitude of injured dignity that had caused Lottie Maynard to go hurrying back to the city with the declaration that when he came to his senses she might be ready to talk to him again.

There was an accent on the "might" that left the matter in doubt, and Julian felt that it belonged to him to keep vividly in mind what Lottie declared to be his offenses.

Lottie was the dearest little woman in the world, but she had very decided notions. To run to those notions was to make rugged the course of true love.

Mentally Julian recited the catechism of his offenses, punctuating his self-examination with appropriate remarks concerning a train that was two hours late.

He was still ocupied with this task when a distant whistle sounded, and the waiting passengers hurried from the station to the platform. There was some grumbling when it was seen that this was only a slow train from the south instead of the desired southbound, but they lined up along the platform to watch the arrival of the few passengers who were making a change. Then they hurried back to the warmth of the waiting room.

Only one girl remained behind to walk briskly up and down the platform. With a glad cry of surprise Julian hurried toward her.

"What are you doing here?" Lottie?" he asked, as he took her hand in his.

"Where are you going?" she countered.

"I was running down to town to see you," he explained. "And to think of finding you here on your way to Lindon."

"I was not going to Lindon," declared the girl. "I was going on, but somehow I stepped off the train through habit, and the train went on without me."

"I was hoping that you were coming back—to me," he said tenderly, but Lottie tossed her head.

"I told you that when you were ready to admit that you were at fault that you might, and that then perhaps I would come. You don't suppose that I would change my mind, do you?"

"No such luck," he admitted dismally. "That was why I was coming to you."

"To apologize?" she demanded, and Julian nodded his head.

A gleam of triumph flashed into Lottie's eyes, but she was not to be won so easily. She had very pronounced ideas on the proper way of handling the man she purposed to marry, and now that he was penitent, she was in no hurry to make the sweet surrender that Julian sought.

LOTTIE.

"I suppose you are saying that just because you want to make up," she declared judicially. "I don't know that it should count."

"You said that when I would admit that I was in the wrong you would be friends again," reminded Julian.

"But what's the use of admitting that you are wrong, when you don't mean it?" argued Lottie. "You'll say the same thing again the first time that you want to be nasty.'

"Don't you believe it," advised Julian with convincing emphasis. "If you would only know how utterly miserable I have been since you went back to town! That was why I decided to come instead of writing."

"And almost missed me," supplied Lottie. "I think, Julian, that I'll make my visit, and in the meantime think about coming to Lindon on the way back."

"The fact that we met each other here at the junction proves that it was meant by fate that we should be friends again."

For a moment the girl hesitated. She had meant to keep Julian on the anxious seat for a few weeks, but now that he was coming, penitent and conquered, she felt that perhaps it would be well to surrender before he should again change his mind.

"It does seem a little like the working of fate," she admitted. "Here I go out of town to visit in Peltonville and you are on your way to town to see me. You are waiting at the junction for a train that is too late and I am left behind by my train."

"Then accept the omen and say that you will make up," he urged. "We can go back to town and pick out the ring and then we'll come back to Lindon and tell the folks."

For another tense moment Lottie hesitated; then she nodded.

He hurried into the station. When he had gone Lottie dug into the snowbank with her shoe tip and presently some bits of pasteboard fluttered into the hole in the snow. Had they been pieced together they would have proved to be a ticket reading, "Lindon Junction to Lindon."

"I was glad that he didn't know that I was on my way to give in," said Lottie half aloud. "It will be hard enough anyway to manage him without letting him know that."

JIMMIE'S HOME

JIMMIE RIDGWAY loved Maude McArthur, but he feared to tell her so. In spite of her very evident attractions, Maude could not cook, and Jimmie wanted a home very badly.

He had been spoiled by a doting mother, whose every endeavor was to make home so pleasant that he would not want to leave her. So well did she succeed that it was several years after her death before Jimmie even thought of marrying; and even then he wanted a wife who could do as well for him.

Love, however, is blind. Jimmie proceeded to fall helplessly in love with Maude McArthur, who was of all the local butterflies the most gorgeous and the most helpless.

Yet though he realized that she could never make a housewife, he knew also that she was the one woman who could make him happy.

For months poor Ridgway wavered. There were times when he was willing to forego the well-managed home for love of Maude, and again he felt that it would be a great error to marry a girl who could not give him that sort of home for which he longed.

Maude silently watched the struggle, but she offered no way out. She could not even make fudge or taffy, and chafing dish concoctions were entirely beyond her grasp after two terms at cooking school; but she understood her delinquencies and his longing for a home and did not seek to influence his decision.

It was Hollman who helped Jimmie unconsciously to a decision. Hollman in the pride of a married man proposed that the home-lover should come with him for a Sunday dinner. Jimmie had always liked Hollman and he had admired capable little Mrs. Hollman when she had been Ruth Everett.

"A little home dinner," Jimmie explained diffidently to Maude, and she had flushed and had urged him to go. Hollman had moved to the suburbs when he married, declaring that life in a flat was not a home.

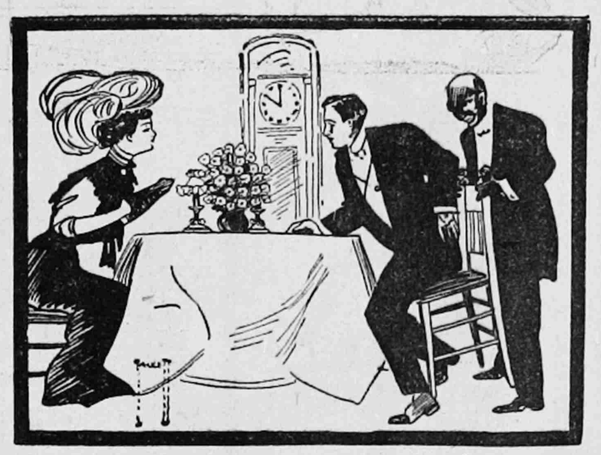
It was a long, cold trip by the local Sunday train. Glowing with anticipation of a day in a real home, Jimmie hurried away from the station after carefully consulting the sketchy diagram which Hollman had furnished. He was met at the door of a pretty villa by his welcoming host, and hurried into the den with its piles of books and its blazing grate fire.

"Ruth is too busy with the dinner to appear just now," apologized Hollman. "She'll be along presently. I'm glad that you came by the early train," he added with a sigh of relief. "The little woman has been busy all the morning. The girl quit last night because she had an offer of a job in town and Ruth had to do all the work."

Jimmie nodded understandingly, and with a pipe and glass he sat down to listen to Hollman's gossip of the comforts of home until the summons came to dinner. The little hostess was standing beside the table looking very much flustered.

It was the first time that Jimmie had seen her since her marriage. He was astonished by the change that had come over her. Ruth Everett had possessed a dainty prettiness that had always suggested Maude. It was all gone, and Jimmie wondered if Maude would change like this when she, too, had housekeeping cares.

"I don't have much chance to get to town," Ruth explained when Jimmie commented upon the fact that it was the first time in several months that he had seen her. "You see, there is such a lot to do, even when we have a girl, and most of the time we do not have a girl."



"DIDN'T YOU HAVE A GOOD DIN NER?"

"She's having the time of her life keeping a house of her own," declared Hollman.

Jimmie noticed the look of mute dissent in Ruth's eyes, and he remembered that the first link which had bound him and Hollman together had been their mutual love of a home. Hollman had found his, and his much-vaunted happiness had contributed largely to Jimmie's own indecision.

The dinner was a trying time. Ruth jumped up from the table every few minutes to obtain something from the kitchen, or to change the courses.

The meal was followed by a long afternoon with Holiman, while Ruth washed the dishes and finished the belated housework. It was nearly train time when at last she entered the den to chat with her guest for a few moments. Jimmie refused Hollman's invitation to stay for supper and hurried back to town.

From his point of view, as an outsider, he could see the selfishness that led Hollman to the belief that Ruth liked to keep house. He remembered her as she was, and contrasted that earlier fragile beauty with the tired face that he had watched across the table.

The car was cold and cheerless and as it rattled through the desolate country Jimmie grew depressed. He welcomed the lights of the city, and he hurried to the restaurant where he and Maude were accustomed to celebrate their little festivals. Over the telephone he asked her to join him.

Presently she appeared in the doorway to be ushered to her seat by the attentive waiter who had served them for more than two years, and it was not long before the order had been given and Maude turned to Jimmie in some surprise.

"I supposed that you would not want anything to eat for a week," she said with a smile. "Didn't you have a good dinner?"

"First-rate," he declared warmly. "Ruth is a splendid cook, but I must commence to appreciate restaurant cooking, and I wanted to start at once. I guess I'll be content to board—with you—and have your company instead of a home-cooking dinner for my day of rest."

"Jimmie, I can make a home, even if I can't cook. I'm learning how," said she.

"I GUESS MAYBE YOU'LL MOVE AGAIN," ASSENTED HANK.

A Few Smiles

Vast Space.

Gunner—"So this is the girls' college, eh? They surely don't need such a mammoth bin as that to store the winter coal?"

Guyer—"Oh, that isn't for coal; that is where they store the winter fudge."

"Line's Busy!"

"What are you laughing about?" asked the inquisitive pigeon.

"My feet tickle," chuckled the sparrow on the overhead wire.

"What tickled them?"

"Some fellow is sending his best girl a dozen kisses over the telephone."

Willful Waste.

"Don't it make you angry to see a pretty girl waste a kiss on a Teddy bear?" asked the tall young man.

"Indeed it does," replied his chum.

"And it is always a bashful girl."

"Sure! A girl too shy to bear a kiss will kiss a bear."

Tart Retort.

"But you must admit," said Reggy Sapp, as he toyed with his oriole hatband, "that I have a great deal of self-possession."

"How fortunate," replied Miss Tabasco, with a frigid twinkle in her eye. "I am sure no one else would care to possess you."

Swamped.

Stubb—"I see your family are back from Europe. Are they well?"

Penn—"I don't know. Haven't had time to ask them. I've been too busy trying to get over the flood of souvenir postals they sent me from the other side."

His Preference.

Patient—"I'm feeling pretty badly this morning, doctor. Can you do anything for me?"

Doctor (after an examination) —"Yes; I'll soon straighten you out."

Patient — "All right. I'd rather have you do it than the undertaker."